

FREE MARKET ENVIRONMENTALISM at FGCU

While toxic water from Lake Okeechobee flows through the state, students at FGCU are looking for real solutions for our generation's environmental crises. An industry funded event at FGCU this Saturday entitled [Free Market Environmentalism](#), featuring a [fracking advocate](#) and [climate skeptic](#), will attempt to convince students that the [solution](#) to protecting the environment is free market economics and deregulating the very industries responsible for these crises.

The event, sponsored by a national group called Students For Liberty, states that it "aims to educate students on environmental issues relating to individual liberty and property rights, provide a voice for libertarian thought in Florida Gulf Coast University's larger environmental conversation." Following the money, one recognizes this libertarian "voice" distinctly as that of Charles Koch (one of the "Koch brothers").

Koch Industries, a notorious environmental criminal and America's 2nd largest private corporation, has interests in fossil fuels, industrial chemicals, forestry, fertilizer, and cattle. Koch coordinates a network of other corporate interests (including BB&T) that have a profit motive for deregulation (aka "free market capitalism," "small government"). Koch's network of donors hold secretive meetings twice annually to strategize and fundraising for ideologically compliant politicians, political groups, think tanks, and university programs. This [political operation](#) is three times the size of the GOP and is looking to spend twice as much around the 2016 elections.

Four of the event's five speakers represent organizations funded heavily by the Charles Koch Foundation and Koch's "donor advised" trusts; Donors Trust and Donors Capital Fund. The Institute for Justice, the James Madison Institute, the Reason Foundation, and the Heartland Institute have received, respectively, \$4,702,500, \$1,528,221, \$5,233,253, and \$18,245,122 from Koch's foundations (as of 2014). Students for Liberty itself has received \$1,295,927 since 2009.

The James Madison Institute, Heartland Institute, and Reason foundation are [prominent](#) parts of Koch's climate change denialist efforts. The Reason Foundation speaker, [Ronald Bailey](#) built a career on climate denial, and despite slightly recanting, is still a [skeptic](#) who insists that free markets rather than "[paralyzing regulation](#)", will solve the problem. The Heartland institute speaker, Isaac Orr, built a career as a [pro-fracking](#) advocate.

Also speaking will be Aliesa Priddy, vice chair of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission who hunted Florida's Black Bears after voting to authorize the hunt. Priddy and her husband, an FGCU trustee, co-own JB Ranch, with cattle, agriculture, and mineral operations. Priddy recently arranged a \$4 million dollar ["conservation" easement](#) on JB Ranch, which despite requiring a list of environmental precautions, would still allow for the extraction oil and gas. It also grants permission to to kill endangered Florida Panthers through "incidental take" permits. Priddy initially drafted these "incidental take" permits using [unfounded claims](#) about booming Panther populations.

Several other FGCU trustees represent the same environmentally destructive industries. Two trustees represent Barron-Collier companies, whose oil, gas, mineral, and agricultural operations have included [oil spills](#), and recently, [leasing](#) land for fracking (acidification) in Collier County. Trustee Smith is CEO of the nation's largest citrus producer, Alico.

Not surprisingly, these trustees have allowed similar free market advocacy into FGCU's academic programming. Between 2009 and 2014, FGCU received at least \$200,000 from the Charles Koch Foundation, and \$600,000 from BB&T, for [a professorship](#) that oversees donor created courses, an economics major, student-clubs (a chapter of Students for Liberty), and other programming.

Leaked [information](#) from Koch's secret fundraisers (summed up recently in Jane Mayer's book Dark Money) reveal that FGCU's programming is part of Koch's political strategy. A Koch Foundation official bragged that "students that graduate out of these higher education programs also populate the state-based think tanks," and that "it's not just work at the universities with the students, but it's also building state-based capabilities and election capabilities, and integrating this talent pipeline."

Students should be skeptical of corporate funded activities, especially ones that further the profit motives of those same corporate interests, whether philosophy, economics, and especially environmentalism. Academic freedom requires objective inquiry. Inquiry becomes biased when one assumes ahead of time that free markets are the answer. If students are looking for real solutions, they won't be found within the intellectual constraints of fossil fuel billionaires.

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